THE

TRAGIC MUSE:

A

POEM.

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K.R., W.

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POEM.

ADDRESSED TO

MRS. SIDDONS.

——— Juvat integros accedere Fonteis,
Atque haurire; juvatque novos decerpere Flores;
Insignemque meo Capiti petere inde Coronam,
Unde prius nulli velârint tempora Musæ.

LUCRET. Lib. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. KEARSLEY, N° 46, FLEET-STREET.

MDCCLXXXIII.

THE TRAGIC MUSE:

A

POEM.

ADDRESSED TO

Mrs. SIDDONS.

——— Jurat intepros accedere Fontes,
Atque bibit: furatque novas dulcedine Vires,
Tollitque ante alios Lapsi peritia Cœtus.
Usus opis nudi vestitus corpore Matris.
Lucret. Lib. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. KEARSLY, No. 46, FLEET-STREET.

MDCC LXXXIII.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

Mrs. SIDDONS.

ACCEPT, fair SIDDONS! this ſpontaneous Lay,
Which Feeling bids me, as a tribute, pay
To that new Queen, whom every breaſt muſt own,
Sublimely ſeated on the Tragic Throne.
Yet mean I not thy Rivals to decry:
A different grace may pleaſe a different eye.
But partial ſhould I ſeem, I juſt ſhall be
To Nature, Reaſon, Sentiment, and Thee.

O Garrick!

O Garrick! Nature's great and darling Son,
Had not thy courſe too ſpeedily been run,
What joy had dawn'd upon thy dazzled ſight,
A Gem ſo precious to have drawn to light!
Nor could mean jealouſy, as Scandal ſays,
Have made Thee ſicken at the orient blaze.
But this bright Jewel from the Mine to bring,
Delightful taſk! was left for generous KING:
'Twas his, all radiant though its native ray,
The poliſh'd Diamond fully to diſplay.
Proceed! thou Soul and Sovereign of the Stage;
Make buried Actors alſo glad the Age:
Call lurking Genius from his lone retreat;
Neglected Bards bid public notice meet,
And they, in grateful Lays, ſhall their MÆCENAS greet.

Gray's Inn,
January 30, 1783.

W. R.

THE

TRAGIC MUSE.

LONG had the buſkin'd Actor trod the Stage,
And fram'd his voice to ſoftneſs and to rage;
A Hero now, and now a Virgin he,
As if extremes in Nature could agree!
Before one Female was induc'd to feign
A Woman's part among the Theſpian train.

A timid

A timid modeſty from view conceal'd
What Taſte declar'd enchanting, when reveal'd;
And lovely Woman, born to give delight,
With winning ſweetneſs gain'd upon the ſight.
O Taſte! thy maxims had the Muſe purſu'd,
That Public Happineſs is Public Good;
That Happineſs with Virtue is entwin'd,
And Pleaſure true with Sentiment refin'd;
The Stage of Morals had become the ſchool,
Inſtead of rank Corruption's poiſon'd pool.

But ſoon the Muſe from Virtue turn'd aſtray,
To ſenſual Man a ſacrifice to pay;
And, when the baſhful fears were laid aſide,
Woman, ſeduced by vanity and pride,
An Actreſs ſhone but to diſcloſe her charms,
And woo each gay Spectator to her arms.
For this her tears, in ſome afflicting hour,
Deſcend, like dew, to moiſten Beauty's flower;

Her

Her dying eyes for t' ..., like diamonds blaze;
For this her boſom courts the wanton gaze;
While, laid voluptuouſly, ſhe wakes deſire,
And ſeems in amorous tranſport to expire.
From theſe lewd tricks, what Actreſs ſtands exempt,
Who charms poſſeſs'd to warrant the attempt?

How different, SIDDONS! thy affecting ſtyle,
Thou glory, pride, and wonder of our iſle!
Unconſcious of the crowds thy talents pleaſe,
Thy motions all are dignity and eaſe:
No trap, no lure, for mean applauſe is laid;
No ſtart, no languiſh, to the Pit is paid:
To Nature juſt and thy Dramatic Part,
Thy Action all is taught Thee by the Heart;
Without whoſe leſſons faireſt Players ſeek
In vain with Virtue's tear t' impearl the honeſt cheek.

Thy piercing eyes, through Paſſion's maze that roll,
Mark all the painful feelings of the ſoul,
With look as keen as thoſe allied to joy,
Or thoſe where revels the IDALIAN Boy.

The glance of Rage, Diſtraction's frantic ſtare,
The pangs of Grief, the workings of Deſpair,
Are there diſtinctly ſeen: there drawn ſo true,
That Beauty's ſelf with terror ſtrikes the view!
When to the eye their aid the features lend,
And all the tints of darkeſt Trouble blend,
To paint CALISTA, fond ill-fated maid!
By boundleſs love and confidence betray'd.

When her proud Spirit flames, like Fury fell,
That Friendſhip dares unwelcome truth to tell;
When Self-reproach her haughty boſom ſtings,
And Public Shame yet ſharper ſorrow brings;
When ſlaviſh Paſſion yields to high Diſdain,
And all the Heroine throbs in every vein;
When Vengeance juſt has laid her ſpoiler low,
And ſhe her weakneſs wails in weeds of woe,
All hope extinct; yet heaves a woman's ſigh,
That one ſo young, ſo gay, ſo ſoon ſhould die!
And drops, by intervals, a guilty tear,
Nor knows ſhe ſheds it o'er LOTHARIO's bier:

Beneath

Beneath a Parent's frown, when preſs'd to earth,
The Day ſhe execrates that gave her Birth;
When, by a Father's anguiſh'd heart forgiven,
She ſmiles, forgetful of offended Heaven;
Then boldly calls the Poinard to her aid,
And refuge takes in Death's tremendous ſhade!
Thy every Look and every Motion ſhew
Th' ITALIAN Bride, the maſterpiece of ROWE.

Thus far, great Actreſs! on the ſtormy main
Of ſtrong Emotion, thine unrivall'd reign,
Where Pleaſure riſes from the ſhock of Pain,
Adventurous have I ſteer'd thy ſwelling ſail
To view, obedient ſtill to Paſſion's gale.
But I in vain ſhould try to catch the grace
Of thy fine Form, and all-expreſſive Face,
When beauteous SHORE aſſumes the Mourner's moan,
And BELVIDERA's woes are all thy own;
Thy Action's magic powers, thy Voice's heavenly tone.

Hold! JAFFIER, hold! let fall th' Aſſaſſin's knife,
Nor dare to hurt thy chaſte, thy loving Wife:

For no baſe league with lawleſs men forego
That higher faith you to her virtues owe.
O hear that Angel's tongue, that Cherub's eye,
That pleads to thee! and that impaſſion'd ſigh,
Heav'd from a heart, ſo tender and ſo true!
Which all its hoard of ſweets reſerv'd for you.
'Tis BELVIDERA pleads; let that dear name
Revive the ardour of your mutual flame:
Let thoſe fond arms about thy neck be thrown,
And all the worth of BELVIDERA own.
He yields! he yields!—What ruffian would not feel?
His ſlackening nerves reſign the bloodleſs ſteel;
While to his boſom BELVIDERA grows,
And loads her grief with yet untreaſur'd woes.
That Grief, that Love, ſo ſtrongly is expreſs'd,
That JAFFIER's Wife in SIDDONS ſtands confeſs'd.

Ye wedded Fair, with tempting beauty bleſt,
And by the Youths of higher rank careſs'd;
Ye City-dames, whom courtly toys allure,
Your eyes turn hither,---and expect a cure.

Behold

Behold unhappy SHORE, whoſe wealthy Spouſe,
While ſhe was faithful to her marriage vows,
Allow'd her all that Luxury can crave,
Or what makes Vanity's light boſom heave:
Yet ſhe, by Pleaſure's flowery hopes miſled,
And proud Ambition, left her Huſband's bed,
To be the Miſtreſs of an amorous King,
And hear the lofty halls with ſprightly muſic ring;
To ſee the titled tribe their tribute lay
Low at her feet; their flatteries to repay
With ſtars and ſtrings, and 'mongſt the modiſh fair
To ſhine herſelf, the firſt beyond compare.
But, ſad reverſe! the royal EDWARD dead,
Her ſoul is fill'd with agony and dread:
Nor cauſeleſs fill'd; from her exalted ſphere
She's hurl'd, the load of guilty ſhame to bear;
In penance doom'd to walk the public ſtreets,
And be revil'd by every wretch ſhe meets.
Nor this alone; want, meagre want ſucceeds,
While with reproach her wounded boſom bleeds.
Lo! ſhe, pale Shade! hangs ſhivering at the door
That wide flew open at her name before,

Now

Now ſternly ſhut; no friend to ſhare her grief,
No grateful boſom to afford relief!
Of all the numerous train her bounty fed,
Not one aſſiſts her with a crumb of bread!
Extended on the earth ſhe fainting lies;
And, gnaw'd with hunger, mercy craves, and dies!
Through every ſcene our eyes with tears run o'er,
And we no Actreſs ſee--but hapleſs SHORE.

Theſe Sketches, SIDDONS! ſhould'ſt thou deign to view,
And own, though faint, the lineaments are true,
I ſhall deſpiſe the ſurly Critic's frown,
And boldly claim the favour of the Town.
Yet dare I not portray thy ISABEL,
Or thy perfections in EUPHRASIA tell;
Where Filial Piety exulting ſprings,
And from her milky breaſt the Woman flings;
Like vengeful NEMESIS, the dagger draws,
And ſtabs a Tyrant in her Father's cauſe!
While righteous JOVE approves the violent deed,
And Men with joy behold the Monſter bleed.

Pathetic SOUTHERN! leave a while the ſky,
And with thy ISABELLA feaſt thine eye.
Array'd in all the lovelineſs of tears,
She comes our hearts to ſhake with tender fears.
Theſe fears are realiz'd!—Affliction's tide
Flows in with griefs, with griefs from every ſide!
Where can ſhe refuge ſeek?—Ah! whither flee,
Eternal Source of Goodneſs! but to Thee?—
Angelic Mourner! on thy Biron's breaſt
Sink down, and ſteal to everlaſting reſt:
On his yet warm, but lifeleſs, bleeding clay!
Repoſe till Seraphs hymn th' awakening lay.
Alas! from this laſt pillow of her woes,
Muſt ſhe be torn?---What agonizing throes?—
She claſps it yet!---What anguiſh-darting eyes?
Too feeble arms!---What ſoul-diſſolving cries?—
Her hold is loſt!---Diſtractedly ſhe raves,
And wildly death with her dear huſband craves!
Her child forgot—ſweet Boy! that courts her eye,
And ſeems to ſympathize with every ſigh!---

'Tis

'Tis madneſs all!——O Siddons, ceaſe to ſtrain
The nerve of Pleaſure on the rack of Pain:
It thrills already in divine exceſs!
Yet fondly we the fair Tormentor bleſs,
And woo her to prolong our exquiſite diſtreſs.

Thoſe finer energies all trace elude;
Yet ſhall thy Poet, in ſome muſing mood,
Recal the Feelings which he caught from Thee,
And thou his great MELPOMENE ſhalt be.
Thee, as the TRAGIC MUSE, he will invoke,
And thou, for him, ſhalt HELICON unlock;
Admit him freely to the ſacred Mount,
And let him drink at AGANIPPE's Fount.
Thus fed, ſome Work immortal he will frame,
Some Heroine draw, exalted as thy fame;
And ſure ſupremely Thou wilt be admir'd,
When thou ſhalt ſpeak what thy own breath inſpir'd.

11:7:49

E N D.